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1907

THE PHILIPPINES;

A LETTER,

BY

BENJAMIN SMITH LYMAN.

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THE PHILIPPINES.

(A LETTER PRIVATELY PRINTED.)

Dear Friend:

As to the general condition of the Philippines, so short a visit there as three months, from last Christmas until Easter, could, of course, produce no more thoroughgoing results than mere impressions. But it is well known that the desire to speak about strange lands is inversely proportioned to the length of sojourn in them; the shorter the stay, the stronger the desire to tell of it. Hence, these imperfect notes are an attempt at a succinct answer to numerous questions that have been asked.

The climate (with a yearly temperature average of 77 degrees at Manila and extremes of 61 degrees and 97 degrees, and with a yearly rainfall of 70 to 118 inches, averaging $75\frac{1}{2}$), was at its best, in the early part of the dry season so-called, yet this year with rather frequent rains in the central island of Cebú; and was quite attractive, like our summer, with little or no excessive heat, and with need of a blanket at night. The next two or three months were to be warmer and followed by the rainy season, and bodily comfort would be less. But the discomfort from heat is in great part due merely to the clothes we insist on wearing. The natural and healthful way is to leave the skin uncovered, and then the tropical heat is not disagreeable. In cooler climates we have to heap on more and more clothing, bringing the skin into an unnatural and unhealthy condition. After hundreds of years of desuetude, the very idea of going sanitarily bare in hot weather makes us shiver, and covers us with goose-flesh—such squeamish geese have we become, to be sure. Among the Americans in the Philippines it is not a question whether

“The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.”

Men ignore the commendable, airy costume of the native laborer, and our own rational athletic, boating or swimming attire; and more distantly approximate to the ideally healthful condition. No matter how hot the weather, they must needs in the privacy of the bed-chamber wear at least the world conquering Hindoo banyan and pyjama (absurdly corrupted to pajama), and, as in other parts of the East, may wear them

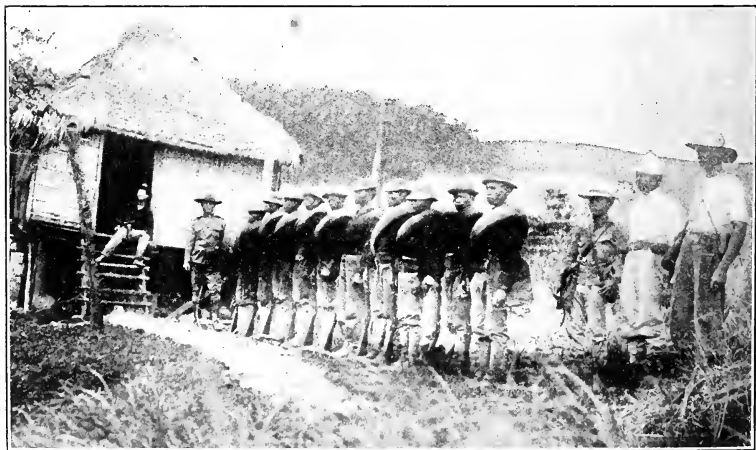
until after the early breakfast. For the rest of the day, the color, texture and cut are changed, and, with or without a shirt, a thin white coat and trousers are worn, requiring a daily or more frequent change, and so quite sanitary as regards cleanliness. For rough, active work in the field, khaki trousers are used, with a khaki flannel shirt or a khaki coat. Under such mitigation, the climate appears, like the yet warmer British Indian climate, to have no harmful effect upon Americans, for a number of years, at least; notwithstanding, too, the alcoholic fire sometimes maintained within, according to the prevalent custom in our newer outlying regions, the result of a free-handed, social disposition, proffering and accepting hospitality in its most convenient form.

To the eye, the climate at first view offers the manifold incontestable charms of luxuriant verdure; giving, indeed, some color to the ancient tradition still believed in Mindanao, that the angels once brought the land of Paradise there, and that some of it yet remains. There are tall palms topping their slender, rather crooked stems with large leaf tufts, and often with great clusters of green cocoanuts yielding a delicious abundance of cool, refreshing water to quench the thirst of travelers in the hot sun. Here and there you see bunches of the plume-like bamboo, the inexhaustible source of implements and furniture for nearly every need. There are many broad-and-long-leaved banana trees, particularly of the kind whose leaf stems produce the fine and pliable, but tough and rot defying fibres of the world-renowned Manila hemp. There are fruit-bearing trees, with bananas, custard apples, mangoes, papaya, bread fruit and others, rank justifiers of the frequently asserted unwillingness of the natives to work even for their daily food. The forests have beautiful hardwoods resembling mahogany, rosewood and ebony. The more open savannas are covered with tigbao, a rush ten or a dozen feet tall, resembling a dwarf bamboo; and with cogon, a coarse grass, six or eight feet high. The two together make a thicket that is hard for surveyors to penetrate. The young cogon growing after prairie fires is said to be nutritious and acceptable food for cattle.

The topography, being of comparatively recent origin, is remarkably rough, with steep and high mountains and hardly anywhere a plain. The difficult surface and the absence of any roads but narrow carabao (or water buffalo) trails make traveling in the interior, mostly on foot—"hiking," as it is called—very laborious. The carabao is practically the only beast of burden or draft, except some small horses in the city, and the number of the carabao has of late years been greatly reduced by rinderpest. Yet the population on the island of Cebú, for example, is scattered almost everywhere, often back among the hills, showing the essentially peaceable character of the country for generations past. The houses generally



Mt. Lantauan, inland from Danao, Cebú. The steep upper part is of coralline limestone, Upper Miocene (W. D. Smith). The foreground is of lignite-bearing Eocene.



A few of the Constabulary, with Capt. Hunt, visiting a camp, near Danao, Cebú.

are wide apart, as in America, and not (as in India) all gathered into villages or towns. Dangerous wild animals and venomous snakes and pythons are rare. There is comparative freedom from domestic insects, and they are chiefly the cleanly ants; there are some harmless lizards, and the noiseless, swift-darting house-lizard may, perhaps, account for the absence of the troublesome small vermin. In the forests there are monkeys. Birds are scarce, and so are conspicuous flowers. There are no honey-bees in some large regions.

The spacious, airy domestic architecture, almost wholly of wood or bamboo, with abundance of verandas in the older towns, is pleasing, and the humbler dwellings of the country are at least open to the breeze. They stand upon stilts, so to speak, raised by posts several feet above the ground, with circulation of air below; and, also, too often not very good air, for this covered empty space is the refuge of pigs and other domestic animals; and even in the cities the lower story, as in Spain, is apt to be devoted to the cattle. Indeed, sanitary cleanliness is not yet a striking feature, and it is whispered that much sickness exists among the families in what should be salubrious mountains, and diseases are thought to spread with the help of mosquitoes and impure drinking water.

The city of Manila has been improved in the scanty eight years of American occupation to an altogether astonishing degree, not only with efficient government and police, but with clean streets, well-handled electric tramways, excellent water supply, several fine public and private buildings, broad green commons, an improved water front, and an invaluable break-water. Americans have been not only inexperienced in such outlandish governmental matters, but so completely unacquainted with the experienced treatment of somewhat similar conditions by other nations, that it would have been a miracle indeed, if no mistakes had been made; and it is truly wonderful that the problem so unexpectedly thrust upon us should have been so successfully attacked.

The people seem to show in their faces a striking degree of contentment and confidence in Americans, as well as respect for them, and no appearance whatever of enmity. The people appear, in fact, to be in the main of a gentle, lovable, faithful disposition, and compared with other Orientals, free from the domination of grossly harmful superstitions, thanks to the Spanish tutelage of three hundred and fifty years; though to some Protestant eyes they still doubtless seem to be subject to manifold superstitions far from beneficial, that need to be rooted out. The Spanish priestly and governing power apparently eradicated the sanguinary propensities so common elsewhere in Asia, and have left the people mild and in the main virtuous. They are often accused of unwillingness to work beyond the needs of the present moment, and of improvidently lying off and spending what has been earned in a few days;

but with sure pay they are found capable of faithful hard labor to as great a degree as could be expected in their densely ignorant condition. Indeed, their ignorance seems to be their main drawback, and aside from the defects it entails, American liking for them is decided. On the tramways in Manila, they are found to be particularly well suited by nature to serve as conductors and motormen.

Along with the great good done by Spain to the Philippines, it saddled upon them the universal use not only of coffee, but still more of tobacco by man, woman and child, unwholesomely tickling the nerves and sapping life and vigor from early childhood, and fostering habits of self-indulgence and of shunning every tax upon manly energy, and of seeking immediate and selfish pleasure rather than permanent national and racial welfare, and leading to the degeneracy of the whole people; an effect which has been, some would say, in the case of the Spaniards themselves, a severe and ample revenge inflicted by the native American tribes for thousands of lives mercilessly taken. The seductive toxicant was comparatively harmless to those tribes themselves, because they indulged in it rarely and only on ceremonial occasions.

To obtain a new, better educated generation in the islands will, of course, require schooling for thirty years or more. There is no reason to doubt that in that time as great progress may be accomplished as has taken place in a like period in Japan, largely by the same means; but in the Philippines, with much less inborn leaning towards military pursuits than the Japanese result of centuries of ennoblement of military life. Not but that the military profession has its worthy uses; yet they are not for robbery and oppression—but quite the contrary, for their repression. A loyal son of Massachusetts may look with approval, still more, with pride, on the motto chosen for the State by our wise forefathers, expressed in brief bald Latin, eked out with a pictorial illustration:

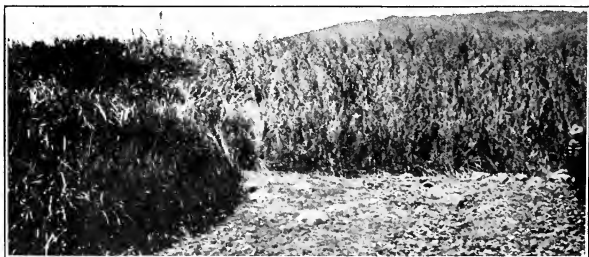
Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem.

They did not forget that the true object of military strength is to establish and maintain peace, so that every man may be equally free to follow out his own ideas of welfare without needless hindrance from his fellows. What our forefathers did in Massachusetts, we are striving to accomplish in the Philippines.

We have had astounding success in our assimilation of millions of ignorant foreigners who have gradually, but now over a million a year, migrated to us. We cannot now doubt our capacity to assimilate their six-yearly number, the half-dozen millions of Filipinos. The figure, too, is hardly so large in proportion to our whole population as was the number of the inhabitants of the Louisiana Purchase when made; a large share of whom, with their descendants, had to wait over a hundred years for admission to the union of states. The delay in their case



A native lady, wife of an American, and their
six weeks old baby.



Thicket of tigbao rushes and cogon grass, with a sweet potato patch, at
camp, inland from Danao, Cebú.



Photo. by J. B. Dilworth.

Mr. Isidro, overseer of laborers, and his family, Danao, Cebú.



Photo. by J. B. Dilworth.

Friendly looks towards three passing Americans from mountain folk, inland from Danao, Cebú. Their dwelling-house. One boy has a cigar in his mouth.



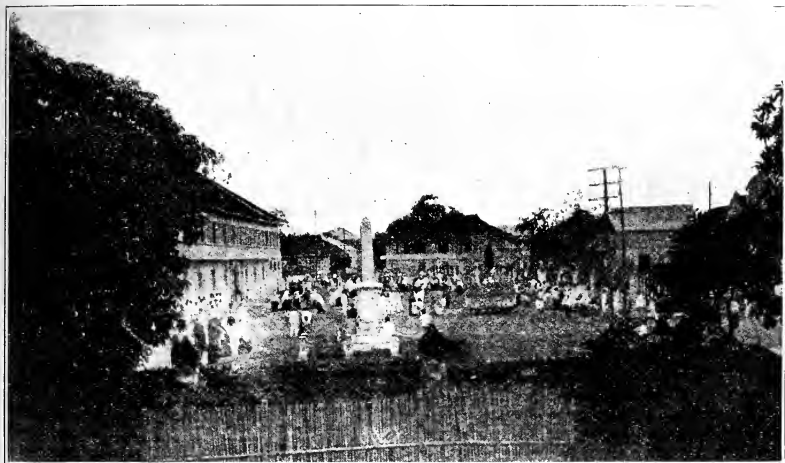
was the greater, because our federal government had not learned, as it now no doubt has, the far-reaching and reciprocal benefit of universally schooling even ignorant savages. In adopting the principle of universal schooling, our forefathers probably little realized they were taking one of the most important steps in the progress of the human race; since such steps are apt to be instinctive, the result of thoroughly ingrained and no longer elaborately conscious habits of thought. But, certainly, that principle is the greatest gift to the world from our America—indeed, originally from New England. For this boon guarantees not only constantly improving enlightenment, but the impossibility of any permanent individual or family predominance, thereby securing and perpetuating indefinitely a republican form of government, the surest guarantee of freedom. Peace, too, is strongly promoted by the more enlightened public perception of others' rights and of the wastefulness of war.

Above all, then, American instinct has established throughout the islands numerous schools, teaching in English to the rising generation; and the Government also promptly began, as learner, the thorough investigation of the native resources of the country and its natural history, particularly its geology, botany and agricultural capabilities, and the ethnography of its numerous tribes with differing customs and languages; and branches of the Government are still actively and ably at work upon those weighty subjects.

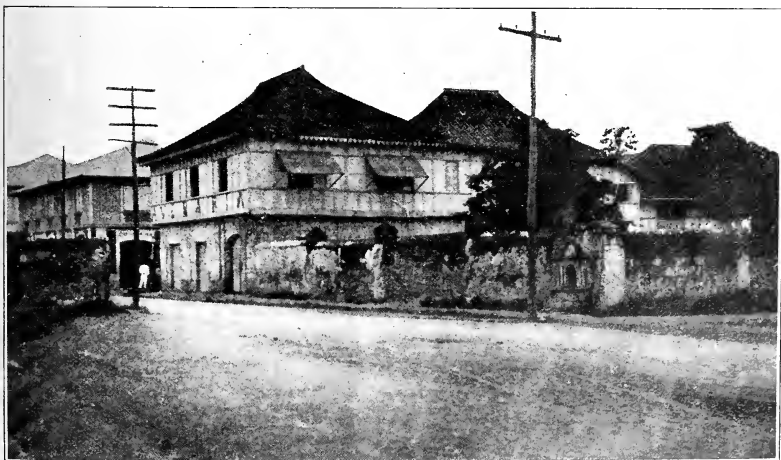
An important part of the population is the Chinese. It is a pity that laws enacted through the political influence of a recently imported part of our fellow-citizens, in absurd fear of too much industry, sobriety and frugality, forbid the Chinese to become more numerous; for, if admitted freely, they would vastly increase the prosperity of the islands, and would largely enhance our influence on China. Every Chinaman who returned home would be a persuasive missionary of American ideas, of universal schooling and republicanism, ideas to which the Chinese are sure to take very kindly and readily. The effect upon China of the neighboring Philippines under American control, and of the return home of many Chinamen who have long been domiciled among us would be sure to be very great, and would strongly tend to establish our peace and freedom insuring methods in that immense country containing a quarter of the whole human race, to whom, with their peace-loving, commercial, industrious propensities, those methods would be thoroughly congenial. It is earnestly to be hoped that our Government may come to perceive the justice of the idea that the world is for the whole human race to go and come through it at will (except for criminal interference with fellow-men); though claiming at the same time that so-called private ownership of land is, a convenient, and in a couple of thousand years found to be a highly practical arrangement for managing the land, and one in the long run altogether beneficial to the whole community, and far better in

results than the savage plan of having all land directly controlled in common by the public. If our Government should therefore abandon the exclusion policy so long followed by the Chinese themselves, a barbarous policy, as we justly thought sixty years ago; and should admit the Chinese freely to our territory, especially to the Philippines, the islands would rejoice and blossom as a rose, and with so energetic, intelligent, industrious and enterprising a population would become an extremely valuable part of our domain. It is only needful to point to Singapore and the rest of the Straits Settlements, to show how admirable may be a Chinese population under good management. The exclusion policy is, indeed, a timid policy, prompted by fear that the Chinese would outdo us, so far excel us as to cause the loss of our country to ourselves or to our posterity. If they be really so superior, would it not be just (that is, best for the human race) that they should take possession? Should we not in the end humbly admit our inferiority (if so it be) and submit patiently to the loss? But my own belief is firm that, notwithstanding the great merits of the Chinese, our own vigor and enterprise and ingenuity will surpass theirs, and that in the end we shall be in the lead.

A fellow steamer-passenger, from Montana, soon after my arrival in the Philippines, began his brief acquaintance with me by remarking: "The United States Government is making one big mistake out here; it treats the natives like white men, instead of like niggers." "Yet here's the spot! Out, damned spot! Out, I say! What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" But it is not a wholly indelible stain; for, observe how in Philadelphia, where only forty years ago it took a long struggle to acquire for the colored people the right to use the public street cars; now you see colored boys associating on the most friendly, equal terms with their white schoolmates, regardless of superficial color. You impatiently repeat: "Only forty years!" as if that were an interminable time; more than a generation! But what are forty years in the life of a nation? Consider, too, the difficulty of eradicating prejudices hundreds of years old, and based on such deep-laid foundations, far deeper at first than the silly one of complexion. We may well congratulate ourselves on the speed of our progress as one of the results of our universal schooling. But what if the goal be not yet attained, and our hands not yet quite immaculate? Must we therefore wholly abstain from other work, from all contact with other men? Must we wait until we are purely virtuous? No; though we be sinners, our aim, without doubt, is more or less consciously high, and is not deteriorating, but constantly higher and higher. While we are, of course, far from perfection, we still in the main effectually strive for substantial justice. With all our exceptional western outrages against Chinese laborers, we still, in the main, even in California, treat them more humanely, more like fellow human beings naturally entitled to equal political



Cathedral Square, Cebú, looking south from the Ave Maria house. Preparations for a religious procession on Good Friday evening. One float, moved by men beneath. The Cathedral tower on the right.



The Ave Maria dwelling-house, city of Cebú, looking north.



rights than they are treated elsewhere, not excepting China. They are, with rather kindly meant familiarity and hardly with contempt, rudely called "John," but are not cuffed and hustled off the sidewalk, as they were by lordly Caucasians at Shanghai twenty-five years ago. So, too, with the negro in the South.

Americans now in the Philippines seem to be in great part made up of discharged soldiers. There were 60,000 soldiers there at one time, and are about 16,000 now, besides American officers of the 5000 native, soldier-like, armed, khaki-uniformed constabulary. Many of those Americans have preferred to stay there rather than return to America. Their military work was most valiantly done and with amazing energy under extremely great exposure to hardship. They lived a rough life, and, as young men, they took "roughing it" as a matter of course, and many of them had at home probably been accustomed to a total absence of luxury; and now, after becoming well-to-do in the Philippines, they retain to a surprising degree the simplicity of their household habits—in some points hardly complying with important sanitary laws. They would laugh at the idea of expecting a pillow more than two inches thick by six inches wide, or a clean pillow case, or a mattress, or two bed sheets in cool weather, or ordinary bedroom utensils, or a clean towel, or a napkin, or frequent brushing or sweeping, "cheap luxuries," as they have elsewhere been regarded, even in camp, for hundreds of years, but now by many considered sanitary necessities. For example, you cannot tell whether the edge of the blanket hugged to your chin was not last night at your feet, or perhaps at some other man's boots. Camp life in the Philippines, however, is by no means so disgustingly filthy as it was twenty years ago in the Rocky Mountains, though very far behind what it was forty years ago in British India, with its still cheaper cost of carriage. With a thoroughly American, generous, sociable nature, those charming fellows have in many cases unfortunately taken to somewhat overindulgence in the easily-acquired luxury of alcoholic drink, freely receiving kind offers of it from each other, and handsomely returning them. Doubtless, too, an excessively nitrogenous, carnivorous diet creates in them a craving for alcohol, as well as for sweetmeats. At length, the custom has become established among many otherwise excellent men to consume far more alcohol than is really good for their health, especially in the tropics. Though decidedly intoxicated men are rarely seen, it is the mischievous "booze," as it is called in the Philippines, rather than the climate, that is so harmful to a large number, though not by any means all, of the Americans there.

American merchants are gradually becoming more numerous in the Philippines, because of the growing market for their goods. That is partly the result of work already done there by enterprising, wideawake Americans, in building tramways, railroads, water works, harbors and other public improvements. They have likewise given occupation to a certain number of

American engineers and others. Employment has also been given to about a thousand school teachers, who, with more than five times as many native teachers and half a million pupils, are revolutionizing the educational condition throughout the islands. A number of the Americans originally brought to the Philippines by these affairs and by the military and constabulary operations have found tempting openings for small or large investments in an agricultural way, in growing hemp, sugar, cocoanuts, coffee, tobacco or other farm products and in lumbering, and have found permanent homes and charming wives, too, in those attractive lands of perpetual summer, "where the fruits and the flowers chase one another in unbroken circle through the year." The sum total of such diverse benefits to Americans is already great, but has, of course, hardly yet had time to begin, and is constantly growing. It is said that some 700 miles of railroad are now building in the Philippines, and the completion and extension of such work cannot but greatly increase the opportunities for further profit to our country and its people, with immense advantage at the same time to all the inhabitants of the islands. The inclination of Americans to stay and benefit the country by investing capital in important enterprises would be greatly increased by a more widespread complete feeling of security in the permanency of the American occupation, a feeling that has been much hindered by the outgivings of perhaps well-meaning, though assuredly ill-informed politicians.

But it would be childlike to demand immediate overflowing pecuniary compensation for the annexation of the Philippines. Grown men should look further ahead. Yet the commercial returns have already been considerable and highly encouraging. The islands are already self-supporting, and will be still more abundantly so, when, two years hence, we are free from the provisions of the treaty with Spain, requiring the admission of all Spanish merchandise on equal terms with American. Then, too, if it be thought fair to restrict all commerce between the islands and between them and America, to American vessels, or Philippine, special encouragement can be given to our shipping and theirs.

We should, therefore, be thankful that, although we did not seek connection with the Philippines and its attendant care, they came to us in such a way that we could not with the least spark of manly spirit shirk the duties and responsibilities of protecting them. It is a burden not too great for our strength, and the reward, though not received in full immediately, is eventually sure and handsome. We must be thankful to have had at the critical moment a Government with sufficient courage to undertake the task, without whining out: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The alternatives would have been to restore the islands to Spain, and perhaps aid her in putting down an insurrection already found almost uncontrollable by her; or to undertake the intolerable entangling alliance of protection of the islands in independence, with the floundering they would have

been sure to enter on in their ignorance; or, again, practically to hand them over to some other Power—Great Britain, Germany or Japan—no one of whom would give them the degree of independence that we are giving them, and are sure to give them, the same that our own territories and states have long enjoyed with so much satisfaction and pride.

We should not be misled by the clamorous outcries of a few Filipino demagogues, who strive to make the most of their fluency of speech to their own personal benefit, working on the mere principle of the outs who simply wish to be in, and therefore seize upon every opportunity to pick flaws in the present management. Their idea of liberty seems to coincide with what is properly called license, freedom for one's-self, with disregard of the just rights of others; and their cry for independence appears to be based only on hopes of power for themselves.

And let us not be scared from our purpose by a niggardly fear of the cost and by doubts as to the immediate profit, leaving out of due account the pressing duty of our rich and powerful nation to help forward its own and the whole world's best interest by advancing our peace-promoting ideas of republicanism secured by universal schooling. The benefit in the end, not only to the islands, but to ourselves, and to the whole world, would be well worth far more than a tithe of all our Federal expenses, and the wildest, most prejudiced estimate of the cost to us so far has hardly been half that tithe; and now for some years past the cost is next to nothing, and in the near future will be nothing at all, notwithstanding the advantages received by our manufacturing and commercial population. Already, this summer, the Philippine Legislative Assembly has been elected and is just now meeting for the discussion and treatment of all political questions that affect the islands. Only one-seventieth of the population took part in the election, showing that there was remarkably little dissatisfaction with the present management of public affairs. Year by year the country there will become more and more interested in such legislative duties, and more capable of performing them in full accordance with what our own larger experience has made to appear reasonable to us; and the time will not be far distant (for a period in national life) when the islands can be admitted to full fellowship in our Federal Government, without danger to our institutions or established policies; or, if preferred, the islands could be set up as a closely and inseparably allied republic—not to draw us into trouble with other countries by foolish international behavior, but to be subordinate in that respect, in return for our protection.

It may be that these opinions about the Philippines may seem to you erroneous. But it will be hard to convince me of their error by mere gift of the gab, or by eloquence enough to prove that white is black, or by arguments not based on the direct observation of facts in the islands, or by the opinions of



men not personally and sympathetically acquainted with the islanders, nor with Orientals in general, and not appreciative of their inborn capabilities and of the merely temporary character of their disabilities caused by defective training. Pardon my bluntly avowing the belief that it is a happy thing for the Filipinos that we possess their country, happy for us, and happy for the world. Under our government, they already manage most of their own affairs and very soon (if their pretended friends—but real enemies—in America cease to raise obstacles) will manage them all, as much as the inhabitants of our other territories do. It will then be only a question of time and education when they will join equally with us in managing the Federal Government. Ah! there is perhaps where the shoe pinches you! For you may imagine them incapable of ever becoming worthy sharers with yourself in the Federal Government. Perhaps you go so far as to doubt whether they are, or ever can be, civilized enough to be capable of managing their own affairs, especially in a republican fashion. Yet, consider that they must be at least as enlightened as the ancient Romans who established a republic that lasted hundreds of years—in fact, until increased civilization made them overthrow the republic. Really, it sometimes seems as if the most enlightened portion of our own republic were less capable of rightly managing the greatest government affairs than the “wild and woolly” portions whose proper human instincts are less corrupted, and are more like those of the early American settlers. They had the instinctive aspiration of vigorous, enlightened men, who, knowing the supreme and universal benefits of peace, seek to establish it for themselves and for the world in such a way as to secure the utmost freedom for all; so that every man may, according to his enlightenment and ability, act freely for his own and the public welfare in any way that does not unjustly curtail the freedom of others.

As our forefathers repressed savagery in their day, and as our elder brothers extinguished the possibility of a rival, and that a slave-holding, power within our borders, so may we give peace, enlightenment and freedom to the Philippines. Let us still hold to the wise purpose of our fathers:

For free life brawny arm and weapon keen

Shall found the heaven-like realm of peace serene.

Yours truly,

BENJ. SMITH LYMAN.

708 Locust St., Philadelphia, 18 October, 1907.

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